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AP Literature and Composition

Title Analysis Revision

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Barbie, You’re a Doll!

At first glance, the poem “Barbie Doll” appears to be about either a child’s toy or a seemingly perfect young woman. However, right away in the first stanza, this assumption is disproved. “Barbie Doll” gives the impression the poem will be about a pretty girl or doll when it is actually about the opposite. The title “Barbie Doll” bears false expectations of the poem’s content while also accounting for an appropriate contrast between the subject and an actual doll.

To begin analyzing this poem, it is necessary to understand all that is meant by the title “Barbie Doll.” First off, a Barbie is a trademarked brand of doll that represents a young, shapely woman with blond hair, blue eyes, and fair skin. Next, a doll is a small figure that represents a baby or a human of any age and is often given to young children as a toy. Dolls are often attractive and young; however they can be expressionless and unintelligent. Together, Barbie and doll infer a pretty or giddy woman or girl. The understanding of the title provides for the ability to realize the exact opposite in the description of the girl in the poem.

The poem makes use of connotative contrasts to develop an image of its subject, a young girl. The first shift in ideas from the “Barbie Doll” title begins when the narrator states that “the girlchild was born as usual” (1). The term “girlchild” creates a negative connotation that explains the young girl was average since birth and had no traits to be adored. Using the term “usual” also provides evidence that the subject of the poem is not extraordinary in any way. The phrase   
“magic of puberty” is an example of verbal irony for it does not depict the girl growing into beauty as the term “magic” would imply (5). Describing her in this way gives the idea that the girl was not extraordinary or beautiful as the title falsely suggests.

The next shift takes place later in the first stanza when a classmate tells the girl that she has “a great big nose and fat legs” (6). This description is the complete opposite of a Barbie doll, who as noted above, is to be young, pretty, skinny, often blond, and attractive. Obviously, with fat legs and a big nose, the girl in the poem is not attractive and struggles with herself to become so. However, the second stanza states that the girl is indeed healthy and intelligent, yet this is not enough for a society that looks for beauty. Her “tested intelligence” is another opposite from one definition that declares dolls unintelligent (7). In these ways, the girl of the poem is not at all like a Barbie or a doll, let alone a Barbie Doll.

In the third stanza, the poem offers explanation for how society pressures the young girl. The phrase “She was advised” implies that someone was trying to mold her into what is accepted by society, therein invoking unnecessary pressure on the adolescent girl (12). In the very next line, the girl is “exhorted,” for which the denotative definition is to urgently advise (13). By being advised, the poem’s subject is being forced to try to become something she is not, and upon failing, she gives up and destroys her flaws while also destroying herself.

The final stanza, following the young girl’s tragic death, is when she finally finds peace. Through death, she has escaped from the pressures of her surroundings to become an ideal beauty. The connotation in this final stanza shifts and words such as “satin,” “pretty,” and “cosmetics” provide for a positive, beautiful connotation instead of the pushy, negative connotation from previous stanzas (19). Upon preparing her for viewing, the undertaker has made the girl look beautiful using cosmetics and providing her with a “putty nose” (20-21). At last, people exclaim “Doesn’t she look pretty?” (23). In order to please, the unfortunate girl ultimately takes her own life to escape society’s pressures.

Society pressures adolescents, girls in particular, to exemplify a specific image. By marketing dolls that are beautiful and created to be loved, girls and women are driven to become perfect themselves, while failing to realize that they need only to believe themselves beautiful. By marketing breathtaking, however unintelligent, dolls, toy companies are creating an image that women believe must be accepted in order to be successful in society. The depiction of the young girl in “Barbie Doll” is unfortunately a realistic account for how pressures make the lives of perfectly successful and accomplished girls miserable.

Work Cited

Piercy, Marge. "Barbie Doll." *Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense*. Eds. Thomas R.

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